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g rimoire

spring 2005

volume 44

letter from the editress

“Staring at the blank page before you,
Open up the dirty window,
Let the sun illuminate the words that you could not find...”

Each time the lyrics of Natasha Bedingfield’s “Unwritten” play over in my head, I can’t help but be reminded of the seemingly unattainable goals I dream up for myself every day. Not just the dream, but also the struggle to make those visions real—to voice the words and feelings that no one else can—quickly becomes more tiring and frustrating than life itself. Compared to the size of the whole, the simple goal of being published in this unknown, student-run magazine is but a small accomplishment. This becomes obvious, as this book may eventually (and most likely will) pass from your hand, the reader’s, to the ground, or a trashcan, or—if we’re lucky—tossed out of a third-story dorm window.

But the Grimoire is more than just a magazine—it’s a monument on which is carved the legacy of hundreds of students. Those graduating this spring will leave a part of their past behind as they move boldly forward towards a new future. This magazine is a relic; its contents tell of times past, journeys traveled, and dreams won. Inside rest the indelible memories of those who put their all into creating something they love, in hopes of sharing it with the rest of the world. And hope, too—glimpses of a bright future for all the artists, poets, and writers—floods every page. Their time is now—today is where their book begins.

The rest is still unwritten.

Anna Alesiani
Managing Editress

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w a i t i n g

C . k . F .

2:05 A.M.
snow again.
Saffron dusk.

3.1 - 4. 2005

c r i m s o n i s n ' t r e d

C h r i s t i n a K r a n k e m a n n

Crimson isn't red damn it!
Why can't you get it?
The need to oversimplify
leaves artistic vision dry.

It's like calling caviar
"fancy fish babies".
Or a beauty queen
"a plain looking lady".

Crimson isn't red DAMN IT!



thorn in my side

Catherine Farrell

v i b e s

Lucian Tucker

Sitting by the phone alone
Waiting for a ring
Silence—as I lie stone prone
Not thinking a thing

Darkness makes the room look empty
Silence stirs the heart
Thoughts and feelings contradict and disagree
Tearing me apart

Sitting by the phone alone
Waiting for a ring
Silence—as I lie stone prone
Not thinking a thing

Hanging on a piece of thread
I slowly release my grip
Pulling the covers over my head
I lay—try to forget

But the darkness and the silence and...
It's all just way too much
Damn, I can't handle the suspense
I'm horrible in the clutch

Sitting by the phone alone
Waiting for a ring
Silence—as I lie stone prone
Not thinking a thing

I quickly grab my phone to call
In this irate state
And realized that I missed two calls
My phone was on vibrate

Sitting by the phone alone
Waiting for a ring
Silence—as I lie stone prone
"Repercussion stings..."

walhall a

Anna Alesiani

I am thinking of the time, long ago
When we were running,
Chasing, at the speed of light
That forever-dying star,
That cosmic energy
That compels the soul to fight,
The hidden inspiration inside us all.
And, with every step taken,
The closer we are to that brilliant shine.
I can see myself reaching for it,
Feel the heat traveling through my fingers.
We break through.
This beautiful light surrounds us,
Our bodies creating ripples in this water.
An intense feeling of euphoria washes over me,
An eternal happiness,
As we glide on the waves,
Our heaven.
And through all the trials and perils of the journey,
I cannot remember stumbling even once,
Nor falling into that dark pit of failure.
We have not faltered.
Or have we?

February 18, 2002

midnight and 42 minutes

C. K. F.

Midnight. And 42 minutes.

I loved doing laundry at this time. All the fresh linen was on the couch, but first! I had to make room in the back closet. I didn't know why I never cleared it out before. All these old clothes that Mom just never wanted to get rid of all got piled up in here.

Rummaging through the closet, its sectioned innards: musty old clothes, moth-drilled wools, I inhaled. It felt like a portal to a period of when I just didn't know. Touching these clothes—that were only familiar because of old photos I had seen—was like stepping across a timeline.

And in between my childhood clothing was this little boy's jacket. It didn't look familiar at all. I never wore boy's clothing. I never had any boy cousins come over. Actually, I didn't have any boy cousins. I looked it over for a few seconds then put it aside on the floor and got up. All the decades-old clothing was now out.

I plopped myself onto the floor and sighed. Looking around, I noticed the soft lighting. Night overflowed into the house through the glass doors behind the dark kitchen. Only one lamp on in the living room, there was only a dim flush sweeping over the frame of the furniture and the straight edges of the walls. I began folding. It felt like if I kept sitting here, taking my time... it was... like there was no such thing as time. Only tonight and right now.

Looking out the window, all the lights were out. It was so quiet. When the sun came down and the blue-black blanket was spread out, and whoever it was that sprinkled the stars over us, did the sandy sleeping powder really put everyone to sleep?

I smiled. At this time, when all calls, problems, and existence ceased, I was awake to sit here, do my laundry, and feel it dormant, not hectic.

2:35 a.m. The phone started ringing. I stood up and turned my head to the kitchen counter. *Who calls at fucking two in the morning?* The shirt in my hand slipped back onto the pile. No one had ever called me at this time before. I stood there, counting the rings: *one. two. three. four. five.* The answering machine picked up. It must've been the wrong number, I thought, but then a voice sighed-in into the machine and softly sifted out into the air. It was Aaron.

"I didn't think you were asleep," his voice trailed unsurely at that word. His speech was slow and paced. "Actually, I don't think you are. So I'm coming over. I'll be outside your house in twelve minutes. I want to take a walk, come with me? By the way, it's 54° F outside." *Click.*

It was a soft click. I was blank. His voice was still echoing in my head. I kept staring at the machine until the echo died down. Then I grabbed the folded stack and walked over to the closet. There was a bump under my foot. I hadn't noticed

the bulging pocket of the little orange jacket. I crouched down and felt inside, wrapping my fingers around a small sack.

A little plain doll. She was simple: onyx-black hair and a starless look on her quiet face. She had two tiny coffee-mocha bead-stitched eyes. I applied pressure at the joints of her arms and in a complacent resign, she waved her hands at me.

Unawarely, I jerked up, remembering the message on the answering machine. *54 degrees*; I pulled on a sweater and stuffed the doll inside my pocket. I stepped towards the door. My fingers tipped the knob when I turned around to look at the room. My eyes glanced over the shadowed walls, silhouetted table legs, but paused at the kitchen counter—the red blinking of the machine. I sighed quietly: I didn't even remember you.

I stood under a streetlamp rocking on the points of my feet, looking around while I held my arms trying to keep warm. Had it been twelve minutes? All the lights in the neighborhood were out and the wind picked up once in a while. I looked around idly and realized I liked waiting.

There he was, turning the corner. This feeling felt so familiar. I wondered why. Then I remembered the doll and took it out.

"Hey." I smiled up at him.

He looked at me then at the doll. He then glanced over at the ground.

I looked at him, wondering when it was the last time I saw him. "Has it been very long? I can't remember."

He looked back up at me, "Maybe two. or three years."

"Oh." But somehow, I just couldn't feel the absence. It was like he had never left an empty spot to be absent from. But then seeing him again now, it felt so normal.

I extended my hand, "Hey, look what I found. I was looking through Mom's closet but I don't think my mom ever made a doll for me. I wonder whose it was." I kept staring at the doll.

"You really have shit memory, don't you?"

I turned at the blunt words, "Hah?" He looked at me expecting an answer. I started laughing.

He pursed his lips and gave me a wry look.

"What?" I insisted, my laughter pursuing him as he turned his back and started walking. I tried to hold my laughter back by pacing myself as I followed.

The dim street lights made a nostalgic, orange-y outline over his neckline and shoulder. I wanted to feel numb as he walked ahead.

It scared me, looking at him in this kind of lighting. I could feel the breeze gently pulling me beside him; the moon slipped behind a shady cloud; and the street lamps lit an endless night. I felt the mood encapsulating two people.

I realized I didn't want that feeling. Fear started to cloak around me and I didn't even know why. I never had any basis for the weighted feelings that were surging over me. How could I feel something so heavy right now? Breathing felt hard and I could almost cry for not feeling numb.

I noticed we were now heading to the edge of the bay.

He stopped and I heard a sliding footstep.

I looked up and felt my chin tighten. My eyes felt cloudy and wet stings

poured over my cheeks.

I thought about the feeling that I felt in the air. It was almost like a promise. But we both had heavy hearts. I didn't want the slight promise of these passing minutes at the certain chance that my feelings would end up entangled and knotted to his. And what would we do in the end?—Both willingly having spun a web where release from it meant an abrupt, tearing sweep.

Childhood friends never did this to each other. Since when could feelings change so arbitrarily? Nothing had changed. Aaron still seemed the way he always had been. What were my feelings? I felt something sinking inside me.

He moved forward and stood in front of me. Watchfully, his eyes sweep-ed over mine then looked away. "I'm sorry," he put his hand in my left pocket and took out my handkerchief. He gently unfolded it. Pressing it against my wet cheek, "I don't know what happened before. Who it was or how it happened... I know you just don't want to get hurt but... if you're afraid..." His eyes stayed on the handkerchief as he put it in my hand, "maybe you're just hurting yourself more by being afraid." His voice was soft as he looked up into my eyes. "Sometimes there are just things you can't control... and..." he looked away. "I don't know... I don't understand them either. But... whatever happens... happens."

I didn't know why I was so afraid either. It's just that I didn't want something that could bring me pain in the end. "It's stupid, isn't it?" I looked after his back. He was walking towards the edge of the pier. "To be afraid of something I can't control. It's just... I don't want to feel that way again—all caught up and entwined I... I still feel only unraveled. My ball of yarn is still only a mess on the floor!" I was half talking to myself, half... half I didn't know. I was just explaining things to myself.

I just had what I felt, what I was afraid of. And there he was, leaning against the rail. I didn't know how long he had felt broken for. Had it been a year since Anne had died? How long had they been engaged for? He didn't talk to anyone for two weeks after she died. He couldn't even attend the funeral. But now... he was ready to get back on the ladder?

"It's just feelings are scary," I felt clumsy speaking. The windy air swallowed my words and I counted the seconds until he answered:

"They leave you feeling violated," his voice trailed softly at the end, staring at the horizon line. "They just do what they do to grow. They don't prepare you for when the pot's turned upside down and... and you can't breathe."

I walked up beside him and leaning against him, sighed.

I suddenly remembered something. I was 7 years old and we had sneaked out to look at the stars. They said there were going to be meteor showers. It was cold and Aaron had lent me his jacket. I was holding it onto my shoulders with both hands while looking up at the sky. The stars were really bright. And I couldn't help staring up blankly.

"Hey! Come look!" He waved at me when he finished setting up his telescope.

"Oh. Okay." I slipped my hands in the sleeves of the cushiony jacket and rushed over. I held the eyepiece, squinting at the lens, when I felt a bump; he slipped something into the pocket. I looked up, blinked over at him, and reached into the pocket. It was a doll—the size of my hand. It was homemade, made out

of fabric and the inside filled with tiny round beans.

"It's for you."

I felt for the doll inside my pocket. Canvas fabric; mocha-colored beads for eyes. I pressed the arms against my fingers: round beans settling in rows.

I took it out of my pocket and smirked. A little bigger than my palm. With both hands, resting my wrists on the rail, I pressed on the folds of the arms. "You made this?" I laughed, looking up.

He cracked a smile when he saw the doll in my hands waving at him. Then he yawned. Simultaneously, we turned and noticed the dawning rays of the sun cracking the surface of the water.

"Hey," I turned to him, "I never returned your jacket."

He laughed looking at me. "You're 20 years too late."

"Well..." I downturn-ed my smile, "Come on. Let's go. You never know."

*on the circus maximus of a
crowded metropolis (ode to emo)*

Rob Peach

He races
As though it were his only means of escape
From this city that breathes
Burning despair, fiery city-dragon
Whose pipelines buried beneath paved streets
Circulate the fuel that erupts in flames
Of endless exhaustion

Through the open sewer holes of our imaginations
Thoughts rise into steam
And disperse into a polluted atmosphere
Where dreams mingle with reality

It hangs like smog
In the rushed hours of this dying day
Leaving him little time
To catch his next stop at the
Oh! Boulevard across town
Or to meet the dead-line
In the crowded subway underneath

Is he already dead?

God only knows, hidden
Behind the high rises that stand tall
Keep reaching, keep standing, almost touching
The jet planes which hum indifferently
Across that big blue backdrop
Where the sun ascends and descends

But he cannot see past the confines of these city walls
Their foundations leave depressions
In the mud of his life
Weighed down by each
Red brick after red brick after red brick
The pressure of fortifying his own security
Leaves him in endless search
Of that colliding creation he calls himself

And hopeless spectators
Cheer him on as he is driven by an illusion
To fill the void of their expectations

And throughout civilization
The other racers keep racing
To an end, a dignity
He, they, cannot attain

why i write

Vernon Preston

I write for those who feel marginalized.
For those who actions belie what's inside.
That's why I write.
For those who dream of tomorrows where the sun shines bright.
And those who want their streets safe at night
And those who have to be read their rights
By crooked cops.
I write for those who wish that violence would stop
For mothers that hope and pray that their kids return from school safely
Or just return.
For crooked cops who only watch people get gunned down
And believe justice if for just them.
For those who look to God for protection
And direction
But are still second guessing
His lessons
So they're stressing.
That's why I write

I write for children who only want to be alive when they grow up.
For the boys whose fathers' never showed up
For the little girls living too fast to slow up
Pause, what's the hold up?
I just had to get myself together
Because as much as I do
Write for you
I write for myself too.
Because when I'm blue, these words uplift me
And when I'm broken, these words fix me
I don't choose words, the words just pick me
Kind of like a lottery
I write because so much stuff bothers me
Because the truth is hard to swallow
Because my people wallow
I need to lead, not follow
And these words give me confidence.

I write because I can't find my way
Because if I didn't, I'd probably go astray
Or probably waste away
Because these words are food and I need to be fed
Like God said
Man does not live on bread
But the word of God
So I write to be a little closer
To my Patriarch
I write because it's an art
And I can't draw.
I write to recite the things I saw
The things I have seen
In my few years on the this planet
I write so I don't vanish,
So people don't perish
Because so few cherish the written word
My ancestors only had spoken word
Because illiteracy was legal
And it was illegal to read
I write because without the past, it'd be hard to succeed
I write for the future that'll see my words as a chronicle
Whether they think my words are horrible or phenomenal
At least they'll be thinking.

Point blank: I write because I can
And my plan is to never stop
To never stop
To never stop
To never stop . . .

w r i t e r ' s b l o c k

S h a n n o n H a l l a m y e r

The cursor blinks,
An incessant silent beat
That taunts my thought
And commands me to keep
Gouging from my thoughts
Words that won't seep
To fingers, unto ink

b l a c k b l o o d

C a t h e r i n e F a r r e l l

Black blood...
It isn't mine,
But it's all over my paper
My ink pen must be bleeding...
Bleeds its soul onto the page.
Or is it my soul bleeding from the pen?



私のこころは、
うたいたい。しかし、

dekimasen

Catherine Farrell

t h e w r i g h t o f w r o n g

H a n n a h L o p e r

I asked the Lord during the sermon today if it's a sin to sleep in church. He didn't answer me. Or maybe He did. I fell asleep so it was hard to hear Him. Pastor Handly probably saw me, but I don't think he cares. I'm a young piece of eye-candy for him, and that's all that matters.

Plus, I'm not the only one. The smelly lady that sits in front of me dozes too. Her head usually starts to bob during the sermon. And the man with the funny-looking toupee sleeps during the prayer. You can tell he sleeps because he forgets to open his eyes after it's over. He needs to take some tips from me. I've found that if I sleep with my elbow propped on the end of the pew and put an opened Bible in my lap, it looks pretty convincing that I'm just reading scripture the whole time. Sometimes it even fools Mom. I know it works because she doesn't jab me in the side.

Mom says she likes church. She says she wishes Dad went more often. But he stopped going the day the lady who looks like a man started hitting on him. Her name is Jerry, and she really looks like a man. Dad said Mom should be careful too. He doesn't like the way Pastor Handly puts his hand on her shoulder whenever he says good morning.

I only come to church every other week, but even that's starting to seem like too much lately. I come whenever it's my turn to take attendance. My church has jobs for everything. Pastor Handly encourages everyone to have a job in the church. He says God appreciates humble servants. Mom is on the "Called to Christ Search Committee." Basically, it's a fancy term for calling random members and guilt-tripping them into joining a committee. Mom says it's like pulling teeth. I feel bad for Mom. She became victim of the Committee herself. That's how she got on it. She says she wants out, but all jobs last three years. She has two more to go. I guess she could quit, but I don't think anyone's ever tried that before.

My job is by far the best. It requires little time and energy, yet it still makes me look like I'm doing something important. I stay after the service and tally up the signatures in the attendance books at the end of each pew. The numbers slowly dwindle every month. The Kurzikis stopped going three weeks ago. So did the Hartmans. After I'm done with this job I think I'll stop going too. I have four more months left. Sometimes the job goes quick if the floral delivery guy comes into the sanctuary. He drops off flower arrangements for the midnight services.

I like to watch him work. He's in the sanctuary today, and I'm glad. Sometimes I crouch behind the pews so he doesn't see me watching him. I can always tell it's him when he comes in. He has a gentle sway to his walk. One pause—two pause—three pause—arm sway. I like how he nonchalantly looks from side to side. He looks as though he has no place to be, although his body moves like he walks with a purpose.

I wonder what it would be like to kiss him. He seems so distant, yet intense.

He emits a quiet, peaceful presence, but I think there's more to him than that. Every now and then I'll catch him smoking a vanilla cigar by the parking lot. I know it's vanilla because my dad smokes the same kind at home. You can almost taste the flavor when the wind blows. People that smoke usually have intriguing stories to tell. It's usually about why they started smoking or how they've grown to hate the world. I thought about smoking myself, but I heard it's a pretty expensive habit and a hard one to break. For now, I'll just stick with the communion wine. I've learned that if you starve yourself in the morning and pass on the unleavened bread, you can actually get a slight buzz off of the wine if you gulp it in a hurry and sneak in line for seconds. I've only tried it once. It's a difficult task to pull off without getting caught.

A piece of flower falls on my neck.

"Oh sorry. Didn't mean to get you up," he says.

He bends down to pick up the fallen flower arrangement in the aisle. My eyes fall upon a tattered gray rectangle sewn to his shirt pocket with the letters, W-r-i-g-h-t embroidered in dark, blue, cursive stitching. The delicate curvature of the name matches the smooth, gentle contours of his face.

"No, it's okay," I say. "I was just taking attendance."

I help him gather the flowers and scoop the loose bits of soil back into the pot. It feels strange to talk to him. I never talked to him before. I'm surprised at how well his voice matches the one that I've created for him in my mind. I look up at him. I like the way he still wears sunglasses in November. The lenses gently fade to different shades of brown. Three small diamonds are attached to each side. His bangs are wispy, and his light, tinted freckles give him a subtle, boyish appeal.

Wright is quiet, so I hesitantly break the silence.

"So where do you work?" I ask, although I know perfectly well where he works. He works at Barnett's Floral Delivery. That's what his truck says outside the parking lot where he smokes his cigars.

"Barnett's Floral Delivery," he says.

He stands up and dusts off the loose bits of soil from his uniform. He pulls out a thinly wrapped cigar from a crinkled package in his shirt pocket. His thin, delicate fingers run over the cellophane. They're thin, yet manly. His nails are bitten down to the beds, but it looks best that way on guys.

"Listen, I'm gonna go out and take a smoke," he says.

I'm not exactly sure if he means that as an invitation or a statement.

"Do you smoke?" he asks.

"No," I say. "But my dad does."

I kick myself for saying that as soon as it comes out. It has no relevance to what we're talking about. This is why it's best to hide behind pews and have imaginary conversations with him instead. Things have an awkward way of never turning out the way they're intended. I follow him outside.

"Do you go to church?" I ask him.

"No," he says.

I didn't think he did. He looks too carefree and happy to go to church. He pulls out a lighter and turns his body away from the wind, cupping his hands around the cigar. The sweet vanilla swirls in the light breeze and lingers on my lips.

"I think that's a smart idea," I tell him.

He turns quickly towards me and coughs.

"Oh yeah?" he says.

"Yeah," I say. "You're free, and no one's sitting in a pew waiting to judge you."

"People judge me all the time," he says. "You just can't let it get to you." He continues to puff on his cigar.

I take a seat on the steps. The cement is hard and cold.

"Why do you go?" he says.

"Why do I go to church?"

"Yeah, why do you go if you don't like it so much?"

"Because I have four more months of my job," I tell him.

But he doesn't believe me. He doesn't believe that's the real reason why I stay.

"If you really wanted to leave, you'd be gone by now," he says.

"And why's that?" I say smugly.

He pauses and throws his cigar on the cement. He smothers the cigar with his shoe and takes a seat beside me on the steps.

"Because life is not supposed to be wasted. Jobs...they're not supposed to be hated."

"Speak for yourself," I say. "I like my job. It's quick and easy and requires little motivation."

"Mine too," he says.

"Do you like it?" I say.

"No, not really."

"Then why are you still doing it?"

"It's a part time thing," he says. "I won't be here much longer."

"Then where are you going?" I say.

"On a hiatus," he says.

"A hiatus where?"

Wright scratches his nose and leans on his knees. He fiddles with a piece of cellophane off of his cigar. I wonder if he's forgotten my question.

"Where are you going?" I say.

Wright lets go of the cellophane, and I watch his eyes follow the wrapper as it floats listlessly in the wind. He looks like he's not going anywhere. The wrapper lands on a yellow flower by the steps.

"You should pick that up," I say. He doesn't.

"You know, I like coming here," he says.

"To the church?" I say.

He nods and takes off his brown, tinted sunglasses with the little, sparkly diamonds. I expect his eyes to be bright blue with tiny turquoise speckles, but they look rather dull and lifeless instead. We're quiet, and I subtly look over at him as he fiddles with his sunglasses. I study his gray eyes, his pale lips, and the dry, wispy bangs that fall past his brow. I start to feel sorry for him. He seems rather lost and somewhat sad.

"Delivering flowers here—it's a peaceful feeling," he says.

"Really?" I say.

I think it's boring and rather corrupt.

"Coming here...putting arrangements under the cross... it makes me think that I'm a part of something good. You know what I mean. It feels good."

"Yeah," I say.

But when I think about it, I really don't. I don't know what he means. Taking attendance never felt good. It felt rather pointless.

"No," I say correcting myself. "No, actually I don't know what it feels like," I say quietly.

I start to feel a dull, empty numbness come over me. It makes me feel out of place and lifeless. I want to go home.

"Well, seems we've both got something in common Mr. Wright," I say lightly squeezing his knee.

"Oh yeah?" he says.

"Yeah," I say getting up. "This church. You found what's right, and I've found what's wrong."

I walk towards the glass doors to go back into the sanctuary.

"What's your name?" he asks.

"Frannie," I tell him. "What's yours?"

"Andrew," he says. "Maybe I'll see you around."

"Maybe," I say. "But maybe not. I don't plan on coming back here next week," I tell him. "Or the week after that."

"You're quitting?" he says.

"No," I say. "I'm just going on a hiatus."

He nods his head and squints into the sun.

"Good plan," he says.

I watch him put on his sunglasses.

"If the search committee comes looking for replacements, I'll send em your way," I say grinning.

Andrew Wright grins too. His smile brightens his entire face, and I imagine that underneath his sunglasses his eyes sparkle blue with tiny speckles of turquoise. The reflection from the sun makes his wispy bangs glisten, and for a brief moment before I turn for the door, he looks free and happy again. I think that's what I'll remember most about the floral delivery guy. I walk into the sanctuary and finish tallying the signatures. I pocket a flower lying in the aisle and head for home.

a d o r a t i o n i n t h e c h a p e l

Rob Peach

Bundled in an over-stuffed red winter coat, she sits quietly, reciting with black prayer book in hand. It's filled with prayer cards and devotions to various saints and blessed—her life's heroes or the heroes of her religion, which is her life. I think she probably had a husband once, but now she comes with a companion, a fellow female, another woman, a friend. Overhead, the artificial air hums from a circulator as part of prayer's rhythm synchronized with the cerebral repetition of "Hail Mary's" and "Our Father's" and "Glory Be's" which wouldn't be complete with out an "Act of Contrition" for sins allegedly committed. She forgets that she too is blessed—a manifestation of God's love, trying to live God's word, Christ's presence presiding over her every move. I hope her heart burns like the Eucharistic life and that she heeds to the healing power within, which no amount of suffering could defeat. The little old lady has seen a long life pass before her, yet an even larger one awaits.

u n t i t l e d

A n o n y m o u s

Hungry Bibles and thirsty bottles
Cannot feed themselves
Much less a human being.
The mind aches out to sea
So hunt, collect, devour
People, places, scenes.
Feed paper to the furnace fires
With ink of gasoline
Until teeth shatter
Gums bleed
Wrecked lips mouth silent pleas.
But smile
Much smoke has been made.
The smell is you.
And Adam's apple won't choke you
No more.

11th street beach,

ship bottom, new jersey

Lindsey Brower

i miss you
our days laughing
our nights reflecting
you watched me grow up

there are times
i just want to get in the car
and drive to you
i could find you from anywhere

you are a paradox
in constant motion
but in the same place
you're never and always the same

i'll be back
i always come back
you are my home
you are my heart

a u t u m n

A n o n y m o u s

The autumn falls, a chill subvert
Between the shirt and skin
While gold snows down from tree to dirt
At the urging of the wind.

I see my love approaching me
Across the gilded grass,
And chill and leaves inquire of me
How long this too shall last.

c o a l e s c e

K e i t h C i a l i n o

now you fall
like the rain
mix with the dirt
between the roots of the trees
coalesce
cover up
you set like the sun
paint the clouds
lighten the sky
ignite
burn me up

seconds

Keith Cialino

Momentary thunderstorm
White heat, white lightning
Blinding brightness and cacophonous noise
Torrential downpour
Rivers through the soil
Ripples extend outwards
Sun eclipsed by grey
Smoke and mirrors
Steam rising from the hot earth
Cracks and fissures in the pavement
Tumultuously battered by the wind
And then her lips leave mine.

no need for a title

Anonymous

Rain Ripping through my eyes,
Acid rain, no surprise.
Metal gashing through my eyes,
Cold hard steel, no surprise.
Hold back the tears,
Feel the pain,
Let it wash over your body and your brain.
A star that fell from the skies,
Be the one that never cries.



"Paraplegic
Ernie"

p a r a p l e g i c e r n i e

A n n a A l e s i a n i

pinnocchio

Christina Currie

Hey Mr. Puppeteer
My strings aren't tied anymore
For the world around me to control my every
Move over
I'm sick of being shoved in the corner
With the dirt and dust
When people have what <I>
Want nothing more
Than to be treated like a person
Without having to struggle
Or put up a
Fight like the soldiers who have made it
Possible to sleep in peace at night
And blah blah blah
Insert propaganda bullshit
Here is my cry
My declaration to a herd
Of people who have never heard me speak
Don't fuck with me
Because you can't anymore.

August 9, 2004

j o h n n y ' s d e a d

A n n a A l e s i a n i

Back in 1977

You gave us a glimpse of heaven

Disco fever was here again

You thought your fame would never end

But now it's the Y2K (plus one)

Those summer nights have gone away

Look who's talking about your shows

What happened to you no one knows!

CHORUS: *Phenomenon*

Was where it all went wrong

And *Face/Off* made us think you were misled

But by far the worst

Was *Battlefield Earth*

What the hell was running through your head?!

It's too late to save him now—Johnny's dead!

Michael was heaven sent

But straight to Satan your soul went

Pulp Fiction was your last big hit

Everything else just looked like shit!

CHORUS

BRIDGE: Kotter won't welcome you back

Lucky Numbers is on the discount rack

Got to get back on your feet somehow

Even Tony Danza's laughing at you now!

Swordfish was ok

A dumb part for you to play

Thank God for Halle and Hugh

Please don't drag them down with you!

CHORUS

Scientology can't help you now
Your fifteen minutes has run out
We didn't want to see you die
Just turn around and say goodbye...

July 2001

Lyrics by Anna Alesiani
Music by One Fish, Two Fish

profoundity in the mundane

Nick Norlen

Demizio was intensely gentle and unwaveringly kind. He wasn't terribly funny, but he had a great sense of humor. He was never spectacular in any other way. But in his quiet manner, he was a profoundly selfless individual. And accounting for all the idiosyncrasies of his demeanor, he carried himself in a way that I've literally never seen in anyone else. His smile was so genuine that its memory makes me question the authenticity of even the most insignificant of my gestures.

But none of these superlatives was blatantly broadcast into my perception during his life. He was simply Demizio. Very simply, in fact. And for such simplicity to leave a multitudinous remainder of reminders that life can be interpreted so beautifully in spite of the harshest heartbreak is a testament to his deeply sincere existence.

So it is with the death of my friend that I find my youth teetering on the jagged edge of reality. My complete inability to quantify the event is a sobering realization that my life has been truly void of anything tragic—a gliding path of snickering innocence. But in mourning my friend, I am reminded of an increasingly less recent time in which I learned how to transcend the everyday pains of life.

"We're so out of place here." At the time, my friend was only referring to the social alienation we experienced in our particular high school, not the how and why of the cosmic scheme of existence, which seemed insignificant compared to its microcosmic counterpart. But what my friend had just said wasn't a comment to be tossed away along with the rest of the trivialities of that uniformed weekday.

Before the intense wisdom of his statement burned away the impurities in our surroundings, I remember squinting in the harsh blanket of the 2 o'clock sun, feeling claustrophobic in the old sedan, one average vehicle among many of its more affluent equivalents in the post school-day crunch of departure. The blurry moment collided with a statement of absolute lucidity, and the resulting profundity-boom struck me immediately, causing my firing synapses to trigger a rapidly-formed grin, the likes of which I so often found myself repressing in the oppressive parochiasphere of high school.

My instantaneous recognition of the insight of my friend quickly led to the perfunction of self-deprecating laughter, performed in classical unison as we stretched farther from the gravitational field of the black hole of hubris. Laughing at the circumstances that are currently making your daily life a miserable struggle to avoid and ignore a continuous void of ignorance is exactly the kind of emotional juxtaposition that makes life worth living. Smiling in the face

of such ice-cold insensitivity is a powerful indictment of the human condition, signifying the ability to reduce any sadness or fear into its base ludicrousness and convert it into a momentary expression of the foundation of happiness that weathers tragedy and disappointment so often in our lives.

In that moment, the smothering shrouds of adolescence were blown away, not in the way of unconvincing convertible-driven pariah-portrayal of formulaic pop-cinema, but in the constricting confines of a Nissan Sentra, our sentry to a sanctuary built from friendship and the mutual ability to translate the absurdity of life into a looping symphony of smiling contentment. It was transcendently simple—the first glimpse that life isn't about fitting in, but rather about finding fitting relationships and nurturing them to increasing levels of intimacy. Suited with the experience-given knowledge that the selfless kindness of friends won't always be reflected in a world so cruel as to deny the most deserving of existence, I know that the fuel for living is having the unashamed courage to utter thoughts so purely honest and poignant as to make the most circumstantially tragic ghosts quake with laughter.

n o t a l l s h o w s g o o n

S h a n n o n H a l l a m y e r

Was there a soul left in him,
as he lay there induced?
Did he hear me repeat "I love you,"
or beg him come back soon?

I ached to feel his presence.
I imagined I saw him cry.
But it was just his insides trembling,
organs fighting machines to die.

I thought that I could shake him
and wake him from his dream,
but I just stood there motionless,
a prop on the scene.

I had hoped he'd smile,
then open up his eyes,
and mumble, "Hey, Goober,"
like he used to all the time.

I said what I could,
though nothing came out right.
What words do justice
to a soul taking flight?

When I left him center stage,
I lugged myself along
a corridor stained with years of tears
that burbled, "Not all shows go on."

R.I.P. Matthew DeMizio

enter night

Dan Kenworthy

The tears pour out
They take control
Each drop shed
I lose my soul

Serenity covers over
Not a good happening
Serenity for me
Is paralyzing

My body starts to shake
And I lose all will
I sit there alone
My heart grows still

I close my eyes
For a new drop to form
They drain my heart
As it will be torn

These tears of blood
Take away my life
As the day moves on
I enter my night

arabesque

Francesca Lo Basso

I can feel the heat closing in, moving two steps faster than the Charleston, pouncing and wriggling like a college student hopped up on too much Aderoll and nicotine. People are looking at me like I'm supposed to know what I'm talking about, but I'm giving them that look that says "you can't possibly be serious." Ruffling around in cascades of Roberto Cavalli's cold azure tulle while my feet are being pinched by Cesare Paciotti, vaulting between pseudo-intellectuals reeking of DKNY masked by a perfume counter dash of Eau de Cartier. You know the type, caught up in the proverb of market success equals sustenance for the family when all they are really doing is looking at their Piaget watches and hoping people are looking at them look at their Piaget watches.

I'm suffocated between too much kitschy saffron taffeta—when they say retro is in they don't mean 1972 bridesmaid—and the paintings on the walls are all starting to bleed together like every last Tuesday. *Man with Cigarette and Jackie O and Junior are beginning to feel like Man has Junior Cigarette with Jackie O.* When you can't tell the differences between your own work it's time to look for a new profession.

The floors moan at this antique house in Old City, the Village, Berlin, Vienna, Zurich, London . . . and I'm reaching for what better be a flute of Asti and not Pinot Grigio with Alka-Seltzer.

"Oh darling! Your paintings simply ooze with that certain *je ne sais quoi!*" A balloon with watery eyes and more eye makeup than Tammy Faye is leaning on the arm of a man six zip codes thinner than she, who's clutching his brandy snifter with militant ardor. Somewhere between his Burt Reynolds' moustache and the Mississippi stream of Remy Martin singing down his throat, he manages to fake smile an "Oh look at how far our little ingenue has come!". . . a square wants to come on hip, dropping French phrases like his cigar ash and pointing at meaningless clots left by my dirty paintbrush and nodding with "understanding."

I'm looking for the man with the patent leather wingtips and the tray bridle with cheap champagne; I can see his head bobbing in and out of fro-hawk coifs and enough hair gel to asphyxiate an army, when somewhere between a woman wearing an Indonesian batik and a bear with grizzled gray whiskers and Reeboks, is the image from the sixth-day of creation leaning against a wall like he's holding it up.

Beyond recognition, memory, want, desire, his image is creeping in my vision, hammering at my cerebral cortex with the vehemence of a blink while the Asti chilling my throat is warming my bones as I recall cheap coffee in Styrofoam cups between fingers blistered with Turpentine and acrylics. Somewhere between mist covered skies when we gave up on remembering if it was morning or night, we'd sit with knees touching beside the radiator that rattled and choked like his '87 Buick and know why we sometimes felt alone at a table full of friends.

Behind the bulwark of amoral A-listers with iPods shoved up their asses, is Zane.

You know the type, hangs out in fair-trade coffee shops and used record stores, talking about nihilism and broken guitar strings, refers to The Beatles by their first

names like he's friends with them. A real scenester. And right on time comes an arm around me that has French tips attached to sausages, and the cuff of a non-Faux Rabbit coat, because slurring into my ear is the same balloon, zonked on eight gallons of fizzy water, who feels the need to reiterate that my "pietheth are divine!" So here's another bovine with too much money and not enough interest who's going to pimp my services because one day when the ceiling leaked and the power got shut off again, I became willing to prostitute my art. I nod because the world's still spinning and hasn't tilted on its axis yet. I say "Thank you," because I've lost my integrity. I inch away because my long-term associations are all that I left.

Fawning isn't the right word because they don't care about anything from Cezanne to Basquiat. The things they care about are given meaning simply because diamonds and implants last longer than happiness. But suddenly the breath on my neck is familiar and sincere and I can still smell the cigarettes emanating from his gray-hooded ectoplasm.

"I saw you talking to that art dealer by the buffet table," I say. "He calls himself an expert on photographic art, yet he doesn't even know who Bill Brandt is."

"Peasant," he says looking at me from behind the same tinted Aviator shades and shaggy hairdo two months away from being called the Vagabond. Yet instead of CEOs, SUVs, BMWs, it's his dirty charcoal Speed Cats that rocket me away from provincialism. It's all coming back now in torrid waves of half-promises half-lived and heart-shaped soaps that seemed so inessential, leading nowhere, leading to resentment that the goal in life should always be art above anything. But art doesn't speak, it only listens as you tell it that the demagogues of our society go to war for oil, and answers are as transitory as science. It's only age that can make you understand because the older you get the more you realize you know nothing.

"Elle, this is Chloe," he says as he puts my hand into that of a woman with blonde hair and a Florida tan, and I only now realize his arm has been around *her* waist. I mutter the "hello," the "nice to meet you," effectively because facades are second nature when you've lived someone else's life for five years.

I'm retreating into a crowd of University of the Arts students and the knowledge that I can no longer bow but only fling myself out of this peristalsis called life that feeds us news instead of truth.

Cornered by the realization that in six minutes life changes irretractably, I down another glass of Asti—my own blood wine—and stare at *Man with Cigarette* for the first time. The matted hair, the ripped jeans, the same gray-hooded sweatshirt. I don't know how I never noticed it was Zane.

"Oh darling, that piethe, abtholutely ethquithite!" She's pointing at Zane glowing in oil-based paints and canvas through a decade of bottles of cheap red wine and stale cigarette smoke shrouded apartments where friends fresh out of college still believed that experience taught them more than education. Reaching into her Bottega Veneta purse, she's already pulling out a credit card (because these day's money's faker than paper).

"I want to buy thith one." She's sure of it. Positive. She's thinking about how great it'll look next to her plasma screen TV and above her Egyptian cotton sheets as the word "No" explodes from my mouth.

She's taken aback, uncomprehending. Too "regal" to ask why. She merely stuffs her credit card back into her purse and takes another walk toward the buffet table.

Fabulous things are invariably, eventually ruined by fabulous people.

t h e r o s e b l o o d p o e t

C h r i s t i n a K r a n k e m a n n

The quiet succubus of the sword-pen
Likes to muse every now and again
over chai-tea latte and ominous prose.
Traveling roads no one else goes.

Quietly, she taps on ebony keys,
Making verse and rhyme with ease,
And in striving to make the perfect conceit
She was left with nothing but broken feet.

Babble bleeds from flowery fingertips
As thoughts whisper from crimsoned lips
She pierces friends and foes in every act,
In every vicious word she can't take back.

Divine words on the grape vine,
Are nothing more than filler lines,
In the many jars of bottled emotion,
ready to burst into the social ocean.

Though they beg for more mundane,
works of love, sorrow and pain.
She does not soften her bloodied pen,
as she slices the paper once again.

Her ultimate goal is kept guarded, hidden.
In the depths of her mind most forbidden.
And in her final poem she reads:
"Remembered are those whose poetry bleeds."



814ever

Catherine Farrell

a little slice of "lunacy": career homicide

Christina Krankemann

“**M**m, Sieg that was wonderful...” Aria purred as she cuddled up to her bedmate. Sieg Mogit smirked and pushed her away. He was quite different behind closed doors. He was much more confident inside a woman than inside a business suit. Mogit ran his fingers through his thinning hair and smiled.

“Indeed it was, indeed it was.” He pulled Aria close to him, bringing her head to rest on his chest.

“Now that the job is done we can do this every night without fear of scandal.” She chirped. Aria lifted her face to kiss him on the cheek. Mogit stayed silent for a moment. Sensing something was wrong, she reached up and began tracing a little path along his chest with her finger. He always liked that.

“Aria...I don’t think that it will be possible as much as we’d both want it to be.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m going to be terminated tomorrow.”

“Yeah, so what? I was let go last week myself. That’s no reason to stop seeing each other!”

“I don’t think you understand...” Mogit turned onto his side and held her for a moment. He didn’t have the heart to tell her about what tomorrow would bring.

“So then explain it to me, what’s the big deal? It was just a job Sieg. You were excellent at that job so you can’t blame yourself.”

“It’s not that, Aria...I might seem cold and unfeeling about what I’ve done but what choice did I have? All of those letters and all of that pain was delivered to them by me.”

“You’re just the messenger, honey. You can’t blame yourself for what happened.”

“I could have listened to you sooner; I could have stood up to Him. I didn’t, and I will suffer the consequences of my cowardice in the morning.”

“Sieg you’re scaring me. You’re acting as if this stupid job was your life!” she shouted. There was a brief silence between them. Mogit reached over to the nightstand and picked up the television remote. He turned on his favorite news station and set the volume on low.

“Aria, if I don’t face him tomorrow I’ll never be able to face you. Unlike you, I don’t have the grace of God ever present in me. Sometimes it stinks to be human, you know?”

“I’ve never had the pleasure. Please enlighten me.” She snorted sardonically.

“We grow up, we go to school to learn as much as we can about the physical

world to get a good job. When we don't get a good job we are made to feel like failures. When we are terminated it destroys the comfortable life we had built for ourselves. Money is what governs human beings, Aria. No one believes in love or faith anymore and that scares me. I have to own up for the crimes I committed. It's the only hope I have of finding true meaning in my life." Mogit sighed. He hated burdening her with his problems and emotional baggage. She smiled and placed a single fingertip on his lips.

"Shh...I know what will make you feel better." She moved seductively over her lover and pushed him down slowly with her index finger.

"Of course you do, that's the OTHER great human motivator, after all." Mogit grinned. The two spent the night discussing humanity and exploring each others' thoughts among other things.

The next morning, Mogit left their bedroom quietly and got ready for work. He bound his neck in his usual red noose and slate-blue business suit. He held one last letter for a moment before placing it beneath his lover's sleeping hand. He walked out quietly and closed the door. Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion that morning. The walk to the subway station, which was only a 5 minute walk, felt like a 5 year ordeal. Once on the train he felt things speed up a bit. He hid his mixed emotions behind his usual scowl and tried not to let his hands tremble.

He felt his heart skip a beat as he saw a familiar figure standing outside the door of his office building. He bit back the urge to laugh. He should have seen this coming. Mogit looked to him with genuine sadness in his eyes.

"I should have known you'd be here, Poette."

"Spare the formalities asshole. I wanna' know where Lucious is."

"I'm afraid you can't see him today."

"If you don't tell me where he is you pussy-whipped little bitch, I'll kill you."

"Calm down...Here take this." Mogit pulled a small key from his breast pocket. The angry young man snatched it and eyed it curiously.

"What's this?"

"It's the spare key to Lucious's office. When you get into the elevator hit the zero button below the basement level."

"Why are you doing this, I thought you were his best man..."

"You thought incorrectly. Come back tonight after office hours; he'll still be here. I have to be going. Good luck to you in your endeavors." Mogit walked past him and a smile came to his face. It quickly melted away as he entered the elevator. Each step towards his employer's office was excruciating. He didn't have to knock this time, the door was open. He walked in silently and took his usual seat. There was only one man, if he could be called a man, in the room. The light in the room was fading in and out. Mogit closed his eyes as his boss began leafing through some papers.

"The time has come, my dear Mogit. You were an asset to this project and one impeccable worker. I enjoyed having you under my wing but I'm afraid your services are no longer needed."

"Yes sir. Let it be known that though I believed in you, trusted in your judgment, and fell in your name...I did not hinder the project."

"For that I am grateful. I knew when I selected you that you would be obedient and trustworthy."

"You mean easily controlled."

"Indeed. You didn't prove me wrong, now did you?"

"No. For that I will receive my release."

"Don't beat yourself up. I have terminated stronger men." Lucious reached under the table and opened a small drawer. He pulled out something metallic. He lifted it up and extended it to his loyal worker.

"It has been a pleasure working with you..." A boom echoed in the small room. A life lived inside the cubical was now snuffed out. Lucious put out his cigarette and stood. He walked over to his dismissed worker and placed a hand on his shoulder before exiting. There was nothing left of the man known as Sieg Mogit but the shell of humanity and the blue suit that sealed his fate.

a fanciful scene

James Keough

The merriment reinforced their illusionary solutions, their false reality.
Empty cups, empty cans, empty words. False promises, false hopes, false identities. He felt falsely empty.
(In need of fulfillment.)
The pulse of the room, the flow of the mood, the groove of the scene.
The daily grind had come to a halt and firewater was the oil to this gasping machine.
(Completely automatic.)
Pump the tap, release. He gulped his redemption, his hope, impatiently.
He looked into the fishbowl before him, felt the pull of this fanciful scene.
(They vomited their secret words onto each other, taking no responsibility.
The stain never came out.)
Truth, honesty, love. They were relative here, and his soul cried out in misunderstanding.
They writhed, gasped for air, grasped whoever was nearest, whoever was dearest.
(At that moment.)
He tipped back the cup, ingesting the last drops of his dosage.
He walked to the door, finishing the night with a wave and a smile.
(Eerily empty.)
The streetlights went on forever.
Wake up, someone yelled, and the black sky flashed white. The stars became eyes for a moment.
(The streetlights guided him on, bringing him home.)
He heard sirens in the distance, but they didn't bother him.
He walked bravely toward the light of his eternal hope, forever home.
(Cold hands brushed his face, but he walked past them.)
The stars began to shut their eyes. They left him.
The streetlights blinked out, one by one, starting on the horizon and then rushing to meet him. Finally he was the only light left.
(Was he here?)
He reached out to the darkness around him. He heard the voices of his life. He had a thought that they were waiting for him, if he could just press on.
He walked on into the dark billows of uncertainty. It was warm there.
(The EMS called it at 12:31.)
It had been such a fanciful scene.

my daughter's soul

Anne Alesiani

I was your foundation...the strength that nourished your soul
The illustrious star that paved the way for your impressionable existence.

How often your youthful eyes admiringly met my reassuring smile
...your unblemished soul emanating from my very depths.

Hardly did you realize the intense flame that you rekindled
From the bowels of my spent youth
...the forgotten familiarity of sweet innocence

Together we no longer cease to exist as unknowns among debutantes
...arm in arm as we grace a grand ballroom.

Eyes searching, we sip of the grapes
Intoxicated at last, we fall to slumber
...each in the other's soul.

double take

Charisse Eldridge

I wonder if people
think how I think
can they see what I feel
flash, quick, don't blink
The face in the mirror
shows no true emotion
a masquerade ball
my mind screaming in motion
I'll smile and say hi
laugh and wave bye
sitting isolated alone
cheese, click, sigh

Life is joyous
presently feeling jaded
the morrow following
here..., again..., it's faded
a vase of roses
a blooming garden now down
everyone in the room
black out, not here, no sound
currently not depressed
today there is no stress
so what's my problem
please, you, guess

I wonder if people
think how I think
can they see what I feel
frown, smile, now blink

a n o t h e r f u p

D a n K e n w o r t h y

I never let go
To the words that you spoke
Every word lingers
In the back of my mind
It brings me to life
To think about that night
When we sat side by side
In the fading moonlight

And the cold air
The breeze through our bones
The anger in our hearts
Burns and keeps us alive
For the time to open ourselves
And save on more life
Every time I look at you
Something happens inside

And I know it's probably just a phase
I know because I'm a lost case
I wish I could do something about it
But I don't want to fuck everything around it.

porcelain express

Christina Currie

A carefully carved future
Crashing, crestfallen
Covering
So delicate and dainty
Was so deliciously dire
Fear of fucking up
Fun flushed away
Her future flushed away
Take a ride on the porcelain express
Losing sleep, tossing, turning
Stomach tightening, taught nerves
Damn class...damn subject
Arrogant, asshole, apathetic
Little lessons to learn
I am not going to fuck up
And take a ride on the porcelain express

February 9, 2005

t h e c r a z i e s

Hannah Loper

I'm not crazy. I'm really not. I'm just trapped with a bunch of crazies in a small, hick-ville town. I plan to get out of here soon though. As soon as I get myself out of this bind. See it wasn't my fault that my dad hurt himself and got sent to the hospital today. But somehow, it's going to come back on me. No one knows yet, but I think they suspect. You're always being watched by someone in Craley. The fat man with dirty toes checks me out whenever I come home from church. He whistles and says, "Hey lookie," when I get out of the car. And the neighbors, they sit on their porches smoking their hashish and stare. I know it's hashish because the cops came by last night and busted a drug dealing across the road. It smells funny too, when the wind blows.

The cops come here a lot. They came to our place tonight with the ambulance and the fire trucks when Dad dislocated his hip chasing the pesky neighbor kids on a horse. See, it all started when Mom said that we should surprise Dad and make his birthday real special this year. I feel bad for him because I know how much he hates living in this hick town. He escapes Craley by living in a world of muskets and battlefields.

Dad tells me his dreams of being a Cavalry soldier in the battle of Bull Run and shows me pictures at dinner of his great, great grandfather that rode with Stonewall Jackson in the Civil War. Sometimes, he picks me up from the country food market in his Civil War uniform. Mom made him the uniform for Halloween one year, and he wears it everywhere. It's quite impressive actually. She made a matching outfit for our cat and took a picture of the two on the porch to send to the relatives. A part of me feels proud seeing Dad walking all handsome and decked out in his blue wool and shiny brass buttons, but I hate how the customers look at us funny.

This year, Dad said he wanted to get a horse for his birthday. He said that if he couldn't go to the Cavalry he'd bring the Cavalry to Craley. Mom told him we didn't have enough money to get a horse, but I said that I had an idea. I might be able to make a deal with Old Lady Jones across the street.

So I went to Old Lady Jones this afternoon and told her that I would clean out her stables for two months if I could borrow her pet horse, Charlie.

"It's my Dad's birthday, I said. "He'd do anything to ride Charlie. Everyone in town wants a horse like yours."

It was a slight exaggeration. Charlie's emaciated and looks like he's about ready to die, but it was the best I get in Craley. Old Lady Jones scowled, but she didn't object because she knew that her place was dirty and needed a good cleaning.

"God will remember your good deed," I said.

I was grateful for the horse and knew that we couldn't afford anything better. Ever since Mom quit her job at the pharmaceutical plant last year, we've been real tight on cash. She said she quit because she felt called to baby-sit the underprivileged kids in the community. It's a really sad case. The kids have

nowhere to go. Most of the kids' moms work full-time at the flea market or the beer distributor up the street, and the dads are usually strung-out on crack somewhere or serving time in the slammer. Mom doesn't get paid much, but she says it's fulfilling. I'll have to admit, some of the little rugrats are kinda cute. They have playful, curly locks and cheerful chestnut eyes. Dad hates the kids though. They scratch up his truck and dirty up the house. He usually growls at them when they come to the porch.

A few of the kids were having a mud fight today when Dad came out to take a look at the horse. He swung the front door open and gallantly paraded around the porch in his uniform. Then a mud patty whizzed past the railing and landed on the front of Dad's golden-lined lapel. That's when he snapped.

"That's it!" he said. "That's the last straw. You kids are dead."

He unbuckled his belt and started flailing it around in the air. The kids looked mortified. I think they were in shock from his roar and the absurdity of his uniform. They dropped their mud patties and started running. Then Dad hoisted himself onto the horse and began chasing them a good fifty yards down the street.

He would've chased them farther, but Charlie's leg gave out. Dad almost fell off and dislocated his hip trying to steady himself. It was a pretty traumatic event. The kids were running and screaming, Dad started swearing, the horse began moaning, and Mom and I started crying. The neighbors came out on their front porches to watch. Someone must've called the cops because an ambulance came shortly afterwards and took Dad to the hospital. I hope he'll think twice the next time he talks about riding horses, but chances are he probably won't. Knowing Dad, he'll probably do it again.

I called Old Lady Jones tonight and told her about Dad. I asked her why she didn't tell me that her horse had a bad leg, but she just started cursing at me and said that Charlie wasn't meant for running. She said it wasn't her fault that Dad cracked up, but she was nice and said she'd pitch in a few bucks towards the hospital bill.

I should've known not to rely on anyone from Craley. Mom hugged me and said it wasn't my fault, but I think she's secretly mad. She'll probably have to go back to her pharmaceutical job to pay for the hospital bills. The paramedics told us Dad's injury will only require minor surgery, but I still feel bad. Dad tried to comfort me when they lifted him onto the stretcher. He said that he knew he'd be alright. He said that if he dies he knows he's going to Heaven because he's living in hell right now. Poor Dad. He just has a lot of pent up aggression, and now he's in the hospital. I hate living in Craley.

I decide the best thing to do to get myself out of this bind is to run away and marry Ethan Ekaf. That's where I'm headed right now. Ethan lives in the next town over from mine. It's still small and hick-ish, but not quite as bad. He's sick of living in his hick-ville too. We're going to make movies and write best-selling novels together in Los Angeles. He doesn't know it yet, but we will. He's working at Honey Baked Ham right now. We stopped seeing each other last summer when Dad greeted him on the porch cleaning his musket. I told Ethan he should feel lucky. Dad doesn't wait up for all my boyfriends. Ethan said it probably wouldn't work though - Mom didn't like him very much either. She said he wasn't Christian enough when she saw a picture of him drunk once. I guess that makes him a bad person. She pretended that I wasn't in the picture too. But I was, and it was a good time.

I rap on Ethan's door. It's 12 AM. I hope his parents aren't sleeping.
"Hi, Mr. Ekaf," I say, "I'm sorry to bother you. I'm in a bit of a bind."

Mr. Ekaf has auburn hair and silver wire rimmed glasses. He folds his newspaper in half and smiles, motioning for me to come in.

"Frannie, you're always welcome here," he says.

Mr. Ekaf is a kind and gentle man. Mrs. Ekaf comes to greet me with a glass of water.

"Frank here told me what happened."

"You know already?" I say. "My God, it's only been an hour since the trouble started."

"Oh yes, honey. See Old Lady Jones told Sue Olavitt that she saw some blinking lights. Well, then Sue went outside to see for herself and called Joe Landis warning him that the police were right up the road from him. I guess Joe told his wife, and well, you know Mrs. Landis. She called everyone from here to the other end of the county."

I sigh. "I just needed to get away," I say.

She doesn't know that I really mean that I'm coming here to elope with her son to California.

"Well, it's good to have you back again sweetie. You probably want to see Ethan. I'll go get him."

I wait for Ethan to come down. I haven't seen him since last year. He made himself awfully scarce since that last incident on the porch with my father. Seems Dad always has a good way of starting trouble. Ethan comes down the stairs. I'm surprised at how well he matches the way I've captured him in my mind. He's thin and pale with flip-flops on in the middle of fall. But he looks good with that sophisticated grin of his and the thin pieces of hair that hang down just below his brow. I think he's surprised to see me.

"Ethan," I say. He comes closer to me and smiles.

He touches my face and traces the contours of my chin. I wish he'd say more.

"Frannie," he says, "I heard what happened. I was worried."

I knew he was really worried. He meant what he said. I loved that about him. I put my hands in his and feel the cool, indentations of his palms. It felt good to feel his presence again.

"Let's run away," I whisper.

"Okay," he says. "Where to?"

"Anywhere," I say. "Anywhere but here."

Ethan nods to his parents and slowly shuts the door behind him. Ethan's parents are cool. They don't ask questions when Ethan goes out late. They know he's a good kid. He leads me to his car. I wonder where we're going but I don't ask questions.

"Ethan," I say, "I like being with you."

I look in the passenger mirror. Things were whizzing by. It's dark, but I can still tell things are whizzing by and being left behind. I like it that way.

"I live with the crazies," I tell him. "I need to get out. I'm sick of it," I say.

Ethan nods and listens.

"The stupid neighbor kids put Dad in the hospital today. I hate this town. And now I'm gonna be stuck cleaning Old Lady Jones' dirty stalls for the next two months."

"How old is Old Lady Jones now?" says Ethan.

"She must be pushing two-hundred," I say. "I stopped going to church," I tell

him.

"You stopped going to church?" he says.

"Yeah, because of that raunchy fat man with the dirty toes. I practice musket loading with Dad on Sundays now. It makes Mom cry. She's worried that Dad and I aren't Christian anymore. She thinks we're going to hell. But Dad said today that he knows that he's going to heaven because he's living in hell right now."

"He's a good man underneath," says Ethan.

"I feel horrible," I tell him. "Maybe Mom's right. Maybe I am going to hell. I lied to Old Lady Jones today to get her gimp horse. That's how all the commotion started."

"You're too good to go there," he says.

I watch the ebony branches sway as Ethan turns into a wooded area. He makes me climb up to a small embankment overlooking the river. It's dark, but you can still see the twinkling of the town across the river. I take a seat on a large rock and watch Ethan as he stands quietly facing the water.

"Maybe your town isn't so crazy," he says.

I wonder if he's talking to me or to the sky.

"Maybe they're just mad at their misfortune," he says, "and they take it out in a crazy kind of way."

"No everyone is quite whacked," I say. "This entire town."

"Frannie," Ethan says. "Do you realize if you never lived in this town, I never would've met you?"

Ethan turns to look at me square in the eyes. He asks the question like I never thought of it before. I guess I never did.

"If it wasn't for your parents, the pesky neighbor kids, Old lady Jones... you wouldn't be here."

I try to think of where I'd be right now if I hadn't been involved in the crazy events of today. I try to think of where I'd be if my town was normal and I hadn't run away.

"No, probably not here," I say. He was right. "I'd be home eating cake."

"Maybe everything happens for a reason," Ethan says.

He seems more contemplative than usual. I walk over to him and brush the stray bangs away from his brow.

"You think?" I say. "Even with the crazies?" We're quiet.

Ethan wipes his nose. I don't know why he's wiping his nose.

"Ethan?" I say.

"I was going to jump," he says.

"Jump where?" I say.

"Jump here," he says.

"Here?" I look down thirty feet below at the broken branches and rippling water by the sandbank.

"It's not that far," he says. "I coulda made it."

"Yeah...well, the water doesn't look that deep," I say. I would've never thought to jump.

"Why the hell would you want to jump Ethan? Ethan, are you nuts?" I begin to shake him. "What if you didn't make it?"

Heat rushes through my cheeks, and I can see my hot breath formulating in the air.

"Are you crazy?" I ask him. "You were going to do that today?"

He nods.

I never would've known. I guess that's how it worked.

"Why?" I ask.

"Things," he says. "Just things."

"Crazy things?" I say.

"Yeah, crazy things," he says.

I watch Ethan solemnly gaze into the sky. He looks troubled, yet calm and peaceful at the same time. I wonder what kinds of things have been going on with him this past year. I think of how much I've missed him. I turn his head and lightly touch his boyish auburn sideburns. I trace the sideburns down to the smooth contours of his chin.

"I want to live my life with you," I tell Ethan. "I was going to ask you to elope with me to Los Angeles tonight."

He laughs, and I laugh too. It seems a little crazy. But it makes him smile, and it makes me happy for living with the crazies. Ethan takes my pinky in his and says we must pinky swear on this very ground that one day we will elope together and live in LA. He says he's happy we're together. I say I'm happy too. I tell him that when I get home I'm going to visit Dad in the hospital and bring him some cake. Maybe I'll even call Old Lady Jones and tell her the good news. I guess I won't be able to look at the crazies quite the same way again. Maybe we're all a little crazy. Maybe that's how it's supposed to be.



m e n

C. k. F.

a f t e r t h e u n i o n

V e r n o n P r e s t o n

We lay awake . . . tired
but still not wanting to rest.
We are quiet.
No more rustling sheets
and heaving breathing
and the breeze blows silently,
sending the drapery of our room drifting.
Moonlight strolls through blinds,
creeping in, as if not to disturb
Us.

And your cheek rests warmly
on my chest
while my hand
strokes beads of sweat from your head.
The night is hushed.
Now we are so close
that I can hear you smile.

We are still . . .
Appreciating all that we have,
All that we are now.
One breath,
One heartbeat,
One life.

you. me.

Lucian Tucker

Pillow. Bed.
I find it hard to rest
Heart. Blood.
That thump in my chest

I'm incomplete
Missing a beat
You stole my breath
Give it back to me

Lip. Lip.
I find it hard to hate
Thump. Thump.
Hearts the same rate

No control
Two are whole
I left my love
Beside your soul

You. Me.
I find it hard to deny
Us. We.
Don't need a reason why

It is beauty
Diamonds. Ruby.
Look what your love
Has done to me

rituals

Donna Saracino

My aunt was buried today from the same church where she was married years before. As I watched the priest shake the burning incense toward the white draped casket, I was reminded of another time when she was draped in white and was young and beautiful. I was eleven and she was getting married to my Uncle Joe here, in what was once our small Italian neighborhood church. The August day was hot and humid, but the air was cool inside of the church's stone walls.

At the end of the mass, just before the *Ave Maria* was played, the newly married couple solemnly walked to the left side of the altar where the statue and shrine to Mary stood. It was the first time I realized that the hymn had any significance and I remember how I almost fell over the pew when I strained to see what was going on from the far right side of the church.

"Lisa, shh and be still," my mother said raising her index finger to her lips, painted red for the occasion. Looking straight at the altar, she leaned toward me and kept her voice low. "This is where Aunt Virginia goes to talk to Mary!"

"She does?" I asked.

"Yes, but Mary won't hear her if you keep fidgeting."

How could my fidgeting interfere with the bride's talking to Mary? My new Aunt Virginia didn't look like a woman ready to have a conversation. She only looked scared as she hoisted up her weighty wedding dress and struggled to keep the bridal crown on her head as she crossed the altar, a feat she admitted to years later. Walking down the aisle had been easier than this! My Uncle Joe followed closely behind her almost bent over at the waist, careful not to step on the dress, its hoops, or rear train. A floral arrangement specially made for the dedication waited nearby for Virginia to place at the foot of the statue. The first few bars of the organ began and the *Ave Maria* was underway.

The turbulence of the 1960's awaited all of us outside of the church, but inside the soothing sounds of the hymn brought tears to the eyes of the onlookers, moved by the beauty of the centuries old song. I was too young to enjoy the music, but I was old enough to become enchanted by the ritual that surrounded it. The bride and groom placed the flowers in front of Mary, knelt down and prayed silently until the last bar of music. The bride's white glove wiped away a tear from the corner of her eye.

"What is she talking to Mary about?" I tugged the arm of my sister, Gina, who was fourteen at the time and sat on my right twirling her hair. I was curious about the whole ritual; she could care less.

"I don't know," she said annoyed, "maybe she's asking for it not to hurt tonight."

"What'll hurt?"

"It—when he sleeps with her."

"Girls, be quiet!" My mother shouted in her loudest whisper voice.

"But Mom, Gina said that Aunt Virginia is..."

"Shhhh!" I was silenced by my father who snapped his fingers and gave a look down the pew that would scare Jesus off the cross. It said, "*You're going to suffer if you keep it up.*" I closed my mouth and wrinkled my brows. *What was Gina talking about? What could Mary do to help Aunt Virginia?* My curiosity had to wait.

"Lisa," someone whispered. I brought out of my daydream. It was time to stand for the funeral procession. My thoughts quickly turned to the present as I watched my Uncle Joe walk behind the coffin. It reminded me of how he left church that day with my Aunt on his arm. He had smiled wide and she looked terrified.

As I watched the other mourners assemble outside of the church, I remembered back to how I waited outside of the church after the wedding. How small I felt and how desperately I wanted information that only big girls were entitled to know. I just wanted to belong. If I was old enough to go to a wedding ... then I was old enough to know—uh—things! I was tired of standing on the cusp of womanhood. I was ready to leap into it and my sister had the information that could help me. I tried again outside of the church while the bride and groom were sprinkled with good-luck rice.

"What does *it* mean, Gina?" I asked again.

"Don't act like you don't know."

"I don't." Just then her brown eyes looked away and something occurred to me.

"You don't know either, do you?"

"I do," she said, "but I'm not saying."

Now I really had to know. What had started out as a little curiosity about a formal church ritual turned into a personal mission. Why would she hold out on me? What was the big deal? I used my only leverage.

"If you don't tell me, I'm going to tell Mom what you said." She looked around suspiciously and said, "Not here — later at St. Anthony's."

St. Anthony's was the neighborhood club where all wedding receptions were held. On the first floor was a bar where the local *paisanos* met to drink and commiserate with each other about how beautiful life was in the old country. The more American dollars they put on the bar, the more Italian *grappa* they could drink. Allegiance to different hometowns in Italy sparked more than a few friendly arguments there—usually decided by a game of bocce ball in the bar's rear. The receptions were held upstairs in the Michelangelo room, called so because of the murals on the walls and the ceiling with the cracked paint. It was accessible up a long narrow red-carpeted staircase, which reeked of the wine and beer from the downstairs bar.

The temperature outside was about ninety degrees and the humidity was stifling. All of the windows in the upstairs room were open in hopes of catching a breeze. Long narrow tables with white tablecloths were arranged horizontally with a center aisle that pointed to the wedding cake, the focal point of the room. Gina and I stood in front of it with awe. It was tall with multiple layers of white, each one slightly smaller than the one below, but leaning ever so slightly to the left. It reminded me of the leaning tower of Pisa in Italy that I had seen in history books, but I don't think that was the baker's intent. The icing glistened as if it also perspired in the heat. Decorated with silver leaves and *gumbetes*, edible round silver balls, the plastic bride and groom statue smiled down on us from the top.

It reminded me of my mission. "Gina, what were you going to tell me?" Again, she looked around before she answered. The coast was clear since the guests were just starting to arrive.

"Okay," she said, "The only thing that I can tell you is that going to Mary on your wedding day has something to do with sleeping on your wedding night."

"I knew you didn't know!"

"No, I really do know but I just can't tell you."

"Who can?"

"Fat Linda."

"Fat Linda?"

Linda Santini was only one year ahead of Gina in school, but in those days one year seemed to amount to a lot of knowledge. People always referred to her as Fat Linda, as if her first name was Fat. She never acted like it bothered her though. Years later even after she lost the weight, people still called her Fat Linda. I looked around for her that day but gave up because as soon as the band began to play, the guests came up the steps. The room quickly filled and lunch began with a standard Catholic invocation from Father O'Donnell. A lone Irishman among all of us Italians, he must have felt like he was on foreign soil:

"Bless us O Lord and these, thy gifts, which we are about to ..."

I received the bread basket from Gina and chewed while everyone bowed their heads in prayer. I had a different type of prayer going on. I was frustrated. *Lord why can't I just get a straight answer to a simple question?* No one would tell me anything. Clink, clink, clink. I was distracted by the sound of the forks, the knives, and spoons the guests now used to tap their glasses.

"What does it mean?" I asked anyone willing to answer.

"It means," said my mother, "that the bride and groom have to kiss each time they hear it." She sighed. "It's a beautiful tradition!" I watched as my Uncle Joe turned toward his bride, eyebrows raised and smiling lips ready. Looking back I realize that she didn't turn to him right away as I have since seen other brides do. She seemed to hesitate and take her time to respond to the request of her new husband and all of the guests. When she slowly turned to him though, he instantly bent down, put his arms around her teddy bear style and kissed her big in front of the guests, who cheered their approval. The party was on!

Through the afternoon the band played traditional music as well as all of the Italian favorites including the *tarantella*. Everyone rose from their seats and descended onto the dance floor. It reminded me of the Mexican hat dance that I had once seen in school with everyone twirling each other around, raising their knees and clapping. My parents were dancing, Gina and I were dancing, and I noticed that Uncle Joe, after a little coaxing, got Aunt Virginia up to dance. It was difficult to avoid the unbustled train on her dress, but somehow we managed not to step on it. Even Fat Linda danced her way over to Gina and me by leaping over the bride's train. I almost forgot that I wanted to see her because everyone was laughing and dancing and having such a great time. Everyone, that is, except the cake. That beautiful cake. The heat, the humidity and the floor thumping took its inevitable toll and the top half of the cake slid down onto the floor. Looking back, it was a bizarre moment. Time seemed to stop, the music wound down, and the guests stared at the iced mess. Someone then let out a small scream and the bride looked ready to faint as the plastic bride and groom cake topper rolled silently to the bride's feet. Gina, Fat Linda and I bolted from

the dance floor before we were blamed for the catastrophe.

Down the steps and through the darkness of the bar we ran to the ladies' bathroom. There we were assaulted by florescent lighting, pink walls and a sickening sweet odor that rivaled any bad perfume I had ever smelled. Fat Linda used a tube of lipstick someone had left behind and applied it in the mirror. She wore horn-rimmed glasses that were as thick as magnifying mirrors and a fake beauty mark above her lip. A white plastic band strained to hold back her thick shoulder-length brown hair, teased high in the crown and smoothed into a flip. Her yellow dress ballooned out from the waist and her chunky feet were stuffed into a pair of her mother's black high heels. Because she was a little older, she was our authority on the subject of whatever we wanted to know but couldn't ask our parents. I poked Gina and nodded my head in Linda's direction to get Gina to bring up the subject of the Mary ritual.

"Linda," my sister asked, "why does the bride always go to the Blessed Mother at the end of the mass?" Linda smacked her lips in the mirror before turning and asked:

"Why should I tell you?"

"I know already," Gina lied, "you have to tell Lisa." Linda looked at me up and down to see if I was old enough, good enough, smart enough, or even pretty enough to guard her precious information with. What she saw was a small dark curly-haired girl with a flat chest and bowed legs that shook with anticipation inside of her Mary-Jane shoes.

Without breaking eye contact Linda backed up into an open stall, reached down into the front of her dress and pulled out a flat crumpled Lucky Strike. We stood outside of the stall and watched wide eyed. I was so impressed that Linda had a cigarette that I almost missed her request, or what you might call her price.

"Gotta match?" she asked.

I ran out and found a matchbook in the bottom of the cigarette machine, next to its empty change bin. I handed it to her respectfully through the toilet stall doorway. She lit the cigarette and closed her eyes in an expression of rapture while she dragged deep and slow. We were patient and waited for her words of wisdom as we watched her hold the smoke forever. Then she opened her eyes and exhaled into our faces. We started to cough as the door to the ladies' room flew open and our mother walked in. Linda slammed the stall door in our faces.

"Oh girls, there you are!" She smiled as she held the ladies' room door open. "Here comes the *bri-ide*!" She sang the word *bride* making it two syllables, each one upbeat and happy. The bride, the dress, and the veil quickly filled up the restroom. Just then the toilet quickly flushed and Fat Linda came out from the stall with her eyes lowered, humbled in the presence of the bride. Linda ran out while my mother shook her head and waved her arms to get the smoke out of the air. She looked our way as if to ask - *were you two in here with her?*

The bride crumpled into the only chair in the bathroom. She was pale and perspired under the weight of the heavy satin dress.

"Gina," my mother ordered, "Go and see if you can get a nice glass of ice water for Aunt Virginia." Gina ran out the door and looked happy to get away.

"Damned cigarette smoke and damned heat!" My mother continued to wave her hands in the air trying to dispense the smoke and asked the bride:

"Need some air, honey?"

Virginia weakly nodded and accepted the glass of water that my sister had run back in with and then ran back out.

The bathroom had a small window which could be opened only by someone very tall, which none of us were, or by standing on top of the radiator cover on the wall beneath it. My mother, high heels and all, climbed up on the radiator and opened the window. She inhaled and let the air attempt to dry the perspiration rings beginning to stain the underarms of her new silk dress. Her look of triumph was replaced by a small scream when her heel broke off as she slipped down off the radiator. I picked up the heel and nervously handed it to her when she and Aunt Virginia looked at each other for a second and then broke into hysterical laughter. Shoulder shaking, howling hysterical laughter. Tears formed in the corners of their eyes and spilled onto their smiling cheeks. I stood there and watched—an outsider again, longing for once to be on the right side of the joke or inside of the knowing. Not too young or dumb, just inside. Then my mother instinctively put her arm around one of my shoulders and my aunt put her arm around the other, drawing me into and making me part of their laughing circle. We stood this way until my mother spoke:

"Lisa, would you stay with Aunt Virginia for a little while? I'm going to see if I can get this heel fixed." Still chuckling and shaking her head, she left the restroom.

My Aunt sipped the water and smiled up at me. An un-spilled tear remained in the corner of her eye and I was reminded of the tear her gloved hand wiped away earlier in front of the Blessed Mother statue. I smiled back and sought the courage to ask her my question, for who would be better to ask than the woman who started it all? She looked beautiful and I was afraid to approach her, but the affection she had just shown put me at ease.

"Aunt Virginia? Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"Why did you give the Blessed Mother a bouquet of flowers at church?" She took another sip of water and looked around as if someone might be listening. *Here it comes* I thought.

"Can you keep a secret?" she asked. I nodded and almost performed a *cross my heart hope to die* arm motion. I was really in now and waited patiently for the mystery to be revealed. Then she just shrugged her white-laced shoulders.

"I don't know. The priest told me that's what I had to do when we had rehearsal the other night." She paused. "I guess all brides do it."

"You mean they didn't tell you that you had to ask her for something?"

"No."

"Nothing at all?"

"No."

"Then why did you wipe away a tear?" She looked down at her left hand for a moment, and then looked back up at me with a smile.

"When I heard how beautiful the *Ave Maria* sounded and put the flowers down in front of Mary, I just asked her to help me to love your uncle as much as he loves me." It may not have been a mystery or a huge revelation but I remember how happy I felt and hugged her until my mom came barging back into the bathroom.

"Virginia! It's time to throw the bouquet!" My mother opened the door wide and Aunt Virginia stood up.

"Lisa?" My husband's voice brought me back to the present. We were at the cemetery and it was my turn to throw a flower on Aunt Virginia's grave. I walked up slowly and placed the flower onto the coffin and remembered again how she smiled at me that day as we left the bathroom.

"Okay," she said, "It's time." She winked and held out her hand to me. "Hope the bouquet goes down better than the cake!"

I left the wedding that day satisfied and happy, thinking that I had made the transition into the sisterhood of women without my sister or Fat Linda, and thought that I finally knew something that neither of them would ever know. When I left the funeral, I know that I didn't, but thanked Aunt Virginia for making me feel like I did.

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